

The Times-Picayune

MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2007

OUR OPINIONS

A jazzy addition

Jazz is one of the gifts New Orleans has given the world, and the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance is returning the favor by moving its graduate-level college program from Los Angeles to New Orleans.

Jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, the institute's namesake, believed that the best way to learn jazz is to study from a master of music, and the two-year program at Loyola University will provide that opportunity to gifted young musicians — tuition free.

The graduate-level program is the centerpiece of a wider four-year initiative, called "Commitment to New Orleans," that aims to revitalize and restore the storm-damaged city through jazz.

The institute has pledged to bring scattered New Orleans musicians home by providing employment and to start public school and community education jazz programs. Students and jazz artists will also participate in community service projects.

The institute bills this program as the largest initiative in its 20-year history, one that embodies all its goals: educating young people about jazz, fostering the next generation of musicians and perpetuating the music.

There could hardly be a better place to do that than New Orleans. Jazz is a cornerstone of our culture, and should prove a vital part of our rebuilding.